

Damien Anto, Master Thief

a comedy in two acts

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Dramatis Personae

Damien Anto, *master thief*

Sganarelle D'Acklamede, *his valet*

Smeraldina, *a young woman*

Crail Princelington, *her father*

The Countess of Barcelona, *an old lady*

Jezebel La Belle, *a lady thief*

Mascarille, *a fellow thief*

Jodelet, *his valet*

Cardinal Dottore, *a theologian*

Alcandre the Magician, *a heretic*

Gusman the Old Man, *a hermit*

Jeronte, *a leper*

Constable, *a constable, probably*

Driver, *drives things, presumably*

Narrator, *voices and such nonsense*

Dialogue presented between parentheses (thusly) is to be delivered to the audience.

ACT 1

NARRATOR: Do you dream of a life full of romantic adventure? Do you crave to escape the four walls of mundanity? Do you hear the call of the wind, harkening you towards the hot embrace of excitement and peril? To quench your wanderlust, our troupe offers DAMIEN ANTO, MASTER THIEF, a new theatrical experience for the modern age! There will be two titillating acts with one fifteen minute intermission. Please be courteous to your fellow theater-goers by silencing your cell phones and removing all top hats. Without further ado, follow us through the door of imagination as we travel back in time, where our cunning hero, DAMIEN ANTO, stands just outside a Lord's manor, preparing to break in...

(Lights up on DAMIEN and SGANARELLE.)

DAMIEN: The sky is clear tonight. Not a cloud to be seen from Ursa Major to Orion.

SGANARELLE: It's beautiful, sir. A better night could not be found.

DAMIEN: Shut up! This is the worst kind of night for people of our profession.

SGANARELLE: But what better night for merriment? Nothing hastens the wooing of young maidens like the full moon.

DAMIEN: And nothing hastens guards to a rooftop-bounding thief like a suspicious silhouette. Give me a boost, Sganarelle.

SGANARELLE: Yes Damien sir.

(DAMIEN uses SGANARELLE as a stool to climb a ledge.)

SGANARELLE: Whose estate are we burgling tonight, anyway?

DAMIEN: You have eyes, haven't you? This is the mansion of the Lord Governor himself, Crail Princelington.

SGANARELLE: Crail Princelington? Are you mad?! He'll come down on you like a morning star if you get caught!

DAMIEN: Come-come, Sganarelle. Where's your sense of Adventure? How could I call myself Damien Anto, Master Thief, if I only ever reach for the low hanging fruit? I am not some petty purse-snatcher or mindless thug, not a simple vagabond or low-life. I am the artisan of the unseen. The poet of stealth! The master of subterfuge! A mind of equal footing to Michelangelo and Leonardo, in that ancient tradition of the art of theft.

SGANARELLE: (*clapping sarcastically*) Bravo sir! Bravo!

DAMIEN: Quiet you fool! Your grandiose praise will rouse the guards.

SGANARELLE: B-but you were just shouting about being the greatest--

DAMIEN: How dare you question my prowess, you cad!

(*DAMIEN hits SGANARELLE with his walking stick, SGANARELLE screams*)

DAMIEN: Shh, be quiet!

(*DAMIEN hits SGANARELLE, who screams*)

DAMIEN: Shh, be quiet!

SGANARELLE: Sir, stop hitting me and I'll be silent!

DAMIEN: (NOW he sees reason!) If you are quite finished jeopardizing our mission, we have work to do. Bring the carriage to the eastern gate and await my triumphant emergence.

SGANARELLE: Yes sir. (You know, I don't help much on the missions, but I sure am good at taking the blame. Thus is the true purpose of a servant, I suppose.)

(SGANARELLE exits)

DAMIEN: Hmm, yes. Of course they'd keep their windows locked tight. I say, quite the intricate mechanism. Such a fine fixture must surely be protecting priceless riches. And as I am sure you've surmised, *mademoiselles* and *monsieurs*, such a complicated contraption can take hours to crack, for even the most experienced of-- *(cracks lock immediately)* Oh, would you look at that. Hup hup!

(DAMIEN throws the lock behind him and jauntily jumps into the manor.)

DAMIEN: There we are. Sometimes I impress even myself. Despite appearances, this handsome exterior hides the perspicacity of a seasoned rogue... and the vocabulary of an academic. I can see, through the glare of the spotlight, your impressed faces. Well deserved! For with this small instrument, in such accomplished hands, I could free the devil from his cage, diminish the treasures of resplendent nations, or charm maidens from their chastity. So unfolds our story, wherein you shall witness many great feats firsthand. But gentlemen, be warned: The loyalty of your women may be forfeit henceforth, as you have - perhaps foolishly - chosen to unveil to them the fullness of my plumes this evening. So enters the thief, quiet as a mouse. No, quieter! Hmm... Yes, now you see it, through the magic of your imagination: A bedroom. With an empty bed? Perhaps Aunt So-n-So is off visiting the country. I suppose she won't need these jewels she left lying around! *(snatches jewels)* I will release these fine specimens to the wild of the black market where they can truly be free.... Free to fill my wallet! Ha Ha!

(SMERALDINA enters, behind a door)

SMERALDINA: Wh-what are these sounds, at such an hour? A delicate pitter-patter, quiet as a mouse, perhaps even quieter. *(moves towards door)*

(DAMIEN opens the door carelessly, but SMERALDINA gasps and slams it in his face, sending him backwards)

SMERALDINA: Who is there? An intruder? Speak or I shall scream for my father!

DAMIEN: My word! That must be Lady Smeraldina stumbling upon my work. They say her father keeps her confined to these grounds, as her beauty is such that it sends young suitors screaming in mad passions. O, the libidinous moan of youth!

SMERALDINA: What are you doing in my house, weirdo?!

DAMIEN: Hush my beautiful young darling. I have come this night only to gaze upon your beauty!

(SMERALDINA "hmmms" in nervous consideration)

DAMIEN: As I spied you in the arbor this morn, the birds became as flutes, and the running fountain became as the choir of angels. I swore that I would stop at nothing to see another glimpse at thee even if it would cost me my life.

SMERALDINA: Good heavens! Such flowery words for a commoner. What would you do with me, now that you have me here?

DAMIEN: I mean you no harm, I only beg the mercy of your presence, even for a short time. The world is brighter with you in it, even here in the dark!

SMERALDINA: Oh my... Many have lusted after my hand in marriage, but they were all rouges, only wanting to gain the power and influence of my family name. Each night I curse my wealth and dreadfully famous father, for these only make it so that I can not trust any man with my heart. But you - a commoner, hot with sweat from climbing up my castle - you would risk your life but to lay eyes upon me one last time? Could it be that you love me and not my family's fortune?

DAMIEN: Oh yes, my dove. (What luck! Her father only taught her the fairy tale version of romance. To protect his daughter from suitors he kept her as naive as a child. Such is the way of foolish fathers.) But alas! I am only a handsome, young, dashing, bold man with talents and tastes below someone of such refined

breeding. My wild dogish manner would not suit such a fine and delicate flower such as yourself. After tonight, I will return to my ways of adventure and exploration among the sands, each night stopping to look at the moon and think of you, the flame of my heart!

SMERALDINA: Oh oh oh, well that's all right, you don't need to go, you could stay awhile. Tell me your name. It's so rare to speak with anyone so honest and bold as thee.

DAMIEN ANTO: My name is Damien Anto, Master Thief. I live a lonely life taking from the rich nobles of the world and spreading the wealth amongst the poor and needy. All I ask for in exchange is a life full of exciting new lands, exotic smells, great deeds, and glorious fame until the end of time. But such a life could not compare to the fulfillment of my truest desire. My sweet Smeraldina, If I could I would marry you here and now, to gaze upon you till my dying breath. You are worth more to me than the mountainous golden hills of King Midas!

SMERALDINA: Oh Damien, my shadow suitor, my cherub of the night, *amarino*, I pray thee, show me your face, and I will show you mine. And then we can know each other, and be locked forever in matrimony!

(SMERALDINA throws open the door and reveals herself, to DAMIEN's disgust)

DAMIEN: Oh, oh, oh-- Oh my God.

SMERALDINA: Please, Damien, you flatter me! *(giggles)*

DAMIEN: Yeah, uh, yes my Dove... (I see now why she sends the suitors running.)

SMERALDINA: So, you are at a loss for words when gazing upon me.

DAMIEN: Uh... yep.

SMERALDINA: Your heart does not lie. God has led you to me, my husband! Here beneath the moon we shall pledge our bodies to each other. And then, even

if it means our death, we will tell my father we are to be wed. There will be nothing he or anyone can say or do to convince me otherwise.

DAMIEN: R-rings.

SMERALDINA: What?

DAMIEN: Rings! Yes, we need the finest rings in the house! They must match the beautiful feelings in our hearts as we pledge ourselves to each other before God. Quick, fetch the grandest rings in the manor and bring them here. I dare not venture out and wake the wrath of your father before we are united.

SMERALDINA: Of course, of course! Only the finest rings will do. I know just the ones. Wait here my lover, I will return with haste!

(SMERALDINA exits)

DAMIEN: Well this is horrible. I shall take those rings and knock the poor girl out. She will wake up with a nasty headache after I have stripped this place bare.

(SGANARELLE suddenly falls into the room, startling DAMIEN.)

SGANARELLE: *(struggling)* Damien, Christ! I heard hushed words and thought the guards might have caught wind of us. Have we been spotted?

DAMIEN: No Sganarelle, no, everything is fine. I was just having a nice... monologue to myself.

SGANARELLE: Well, if I can hear you through the still of the night then others might! Hush yourself!

DAMIEN: Who is the master thief here?

SGANARELLE: *(Sighs)* You are, my lord.

DAMIEN: A fact you too soon forget! Now go open the gate. I'll be down shortly.

SGANARELLE: Yes, my lord.

(SGANARELLE goes to leave, but turns to the audience)

SGANARELLE: (Was that sweat I saw on my master's brow? Perhaps I should leave him to whatever fate he has lead himself too. No, no... he would flog me for abandoning him if he ever got out of prison - and he always gets out! Besides, if I don't look after him... who will pay my wages?)

(Stupid comedy sound. SGANARELLE exits as SMERALDINA enters)

SMERALDINA: My love, I have brought the rings!

DAMIEN: Perfection. *(snatches them)* Now turn around.

SMERALDINA: What?

DAMIEN: Just turn around, I have a surprise for you.

SMERALDINA: What type of surprize?

DAMIEN: It's quite smashing.

(SMERALDINA giggles and turns around. DAMIEN goes to pick up a chair and is about to bash her over the head when CRAIL PRINCELINGTON enters.)

CRAIL: What in God's name?!

SMERALDINA: Father!

(DAMIEN puts the chair down and sits on it innocently)

CRAIL: Scoundrel! What are you doing in my manor?!

SMERALDINA: Don't hurt him father! He is my future husband!

DAMIEN: Oh yes, oh my... Yes.

CRAIL: I see. You snuck into my house in the dead of night to spy on my sleeping, defenseless daughter. You are no gentleman!

DAMIEN: (*standing*) Well, sir, I--

CRAIL: In fact, you are probably some sort of thief!

SMERALDINA: No Damien, tell him!

DAMIEN: Lord Princelington, my liege! Your exploits in the east are known to all. The tales they tell of your handsome stature are not exaggerated. I would not dare to think to speak hyperbole about your personage my lord when I extend my most humble impressedness in the same room as such a great gentleman and patriot. (*bows*)

CRAIL: Flattery will not move my rigid intellect, young man. I am known far and wide for my discerning eye and sharp observational skills.

DAMIEN: Indeed you are sir. For you have discovered my nocturnal intrusion even as you slept in your bed. I, Damien Anto, Soldier and Warrior of God, have traveled far and wide to learn the secrets of master stealth, and yet here you stand. Sharp as ever, I see.

CRAIL: Damien Anto... I have heard that name before.

DAMIEN: Of course! I was there, you see, when you took Constantinople from the wild pagan hordes of the north. It was I that held the flag aloft by your side as you rode victorious through the blood stained streets.

CRAIL: That was you? The flag Bearer? You were so young then! No wonder I didn't recognize you.

DAMIEN: Twas a day I could never forget. A well fought and hard earned victory, with you leading our men, your figure glistening in the sun--

CRAIL: It was night.

DAMIEN: Moonlight, glistening in the moonlight. Much like tonight! Here by this window. Though it was so long ago, I see clearly the young hero who lives in you still!

CRAIL: Ho ho, it is true, I am awesome. Those were the days, weren't they? The mundanities of noble life do not suit my warrior heart, I'm afraid. Do you remember the song we used to sing as we marched up the steps of the citadel?

CRAIL: (*Singing*) We are going to war, against the pagan horde. Jesus is on our siide!

DAMIEN: (*Attempting to sing along*) Going... To war, Sp..er.. Uh horde. Is OH.. S-siide!

CRAIL: Haha, yes! You do remember!

DAMIEN: It has been etched upon my heart for all time.

CRAIL: But what are you doing here? Is it true that you are vying for my daughter's hand?

DAMIEN: I admit it, my liege. I had come to pay you my respects, and offer you my services. It was then, in the arbor, that I spied you daughter. She was... reading? Yes? From the, uh...

SMERALDINA: Oh yes, Cupid and Psyche. I was reading that the other day-- uh, I was reading that earlier today.

DAMIEN: Yes! It was as if Cupid himself was there and struketh mine heart with his arrow.

CRAIL: I've heard such pretty words before from young suitors who cared not for my poor, ugly daughter, and only wanted my assets.

DAMIEN: Had I known at the time that she was yours, yes, I could see how you would be suspicious. But since I obviously couldn't have known that, I know you know I didn't know, because you are so clever.

CRAIL: Oh. Y-yes, of course.

DAMIEN: So, as you see, it is fate! My commander, my father in arms, destined to become my father in marriage! And your daughter, so tragically scarred by... disease? Now struck with Cupid's arrow for a young, heroic soldier, who once served under your command. It does not take a mighty mind to see the workings of God about.

SMERALDINA: Oh yes father, it is God's will! That is why it is so perfect as to be somewhat suspicious.

CRAIL: Oh, my! Could it be that on this warm spring night God himself has blessed my family with this courageous young man?

SMERALDINA: It is as if my prayers have come to life!

DAMIEN: Oh, father! Since that victorious day you have served as the shining beacon of majesty to which I clung to and strived for! Embrace me father, how I love thee and all your family!

CRAIL: Oh, my son! (*they embrace*) Oh my boy, there you are!

(*Two guards enter dragging SGANARELLE*)

GUARD: Sir, sir, excuse us sir! We have captured a thief!

CRAIL: What-what?!

SGANARELLE: (*struggling*) Blast and dammit, get your mitts offa me!

DAMIEN: Oh no, a thief. What a coincidence!

SGANARELLE: Damien, my lord! I see they have captured you as well. I hope you have a good plan to get us out of this, because Lord Princlington here is notoriously merciless when dealing with criminals like us.

DAMIEN: I don't know what you're talking about. Who are you?

SGANARELLE: What? It's me, Sganarelle, your servant in crime.

DAMIEN: Shut up, you dolt!

CRAIL: Villains! Now I remember that name... You're Damien Anto, Master Thief!

DAMIEN: What a fine farce this has become.

CRAIL: Soldiers... throw them both in the dungeon!

(Scene change to DAMIEN and SGANARELLE in cells. A rat squeaks.)

SGANARELLE: Ack! Another rat, chewing on my toes!

DAMIEN: You deserve all the chewing you're getting, you lout.

SGANARELLE: Yes yes, it's all my fault, yet again.

DAMIEN: Woe and hopeless misfortune! We're doomed, Sganarelle. This is the finest prison I've seen the inside of. They even stripped me of my lockpicks. We're to be hanged in the morn... and I've yet to make myself famous throughout the entire world! O' cruel fate! Damn you, Sganarelle! May your worthless soul burn in torment for eternity for betraying me.

SGANARELLE: I'd probably get a better wage from the Devil.

(footsteps)

DAMIEN: What's that? Who approaches?

(*CRAIL enters*)

CRAIL: It is I, Crail Princlington.

DAMIEN: What are you here for? Want to hear me beg for my life? You will have no such pleasure tonight, wicked one. I shall never yield - never give you the satisfaction of watching me grovel before your pampered feet. Whip me, cut me, throw me in a pit of snakes, draw and quarter me, then sixteenth me - tie me to a wheel and roll me down any hill you like! I shall never break. NEVER!

CRAIL: I may have use for you, thief. I have come to offer you your life and your freedom in exchange for a favor.

DAMIEN: Oh please I'll do anything I DON'T WANT TO DIE! Pity me and spare me, wondrous lord. I am your dog! You want I should bark? I'll bark! Look! Woof! Woof! (*sobbing*)

SGANARELLE: You are truly an inspiration, my lord.

CRAIL: I have a mission of utmost secrecy and danger that would only befit a man of your talents and present situation. But first! A lengthy story.

SGANARELLE: Oh, just kill us now.

CRAIL: As you know, in my younger days I commanded the armies of Christ in the pillaging of the East and the subjugation of the filthy, diseased, savage infidels.

DAMIEN: Praise be!

CRAIL: Praise be. It was in the name of Christ that I butchered the pagans of Constantinople and returned triumphant with wondrous treasure beyond imagination.

DAMIEN: All thieves know of your bounty that day. The Golden Fleece of Jason and the Argonauts, the cursed sword of Fu Manchu, the mystic mirror of the Black Queen Obsidiana...

CRAIL: But the greatest of all, and the most holy, was the Lance of Longinus. The spear that pierced the side of the Son of God. For years, that spear of destiny sat enshrined in the cathedral of Serendippo, but a rumor has reached my ears. A rumor that if true could stop the flow of pilgrims into my land, and money into my coffers: Three other cathedrals across Christendom claim to possess pieces of the true lance. Can you imagine it? Three other sections of the same relic? Why would a man whose family is dying of the plague in Stotzengruber travel to *my* cathedral to pray for his suffering children when there's another piece of the same relic right next door? You see my point?

DAMIEN: I believe so, my lord.

CRAIL: So you agree then?

DAMIEN: To steal them? Do I have a choice?

CRAIL: No. Also, there's more.

SGANARELLE: Haven't you asked enough of us already?

CRAIL: You must make good on your promise to my daughter and marry her.

DAMIEN: Oh, ew, no!

SGANARELLE: (*laughing*) I take it back, my lord. You were too lenient before! This final demand seals the deal!

DAMIEN: Perhaps Jesus himself will rescue me from this horrible fate if I collect the shards of his murder weapon.

CRAIL: Nope. Not even God could spare you from this duty. My daughter is my only kin, and you will help her bare my successor after collecting the relics and becoming an honorable man.

SGANARELLE: Honorable! I'd like to see it, but I doubt I will.

DAMIEN: So be it. I will bow to your demands. But I will need a pair of well-bred horses and a sack of gold for my expenses along the road. Unless, of course, you want me to fund our holy expedition with the sin of thievery?

CRAIL: Hmph. I suppose a small retainer is not out of the question for my future son-in-law. I will have servants bring you a sack of coin and my second and third fastest horses.

SGANARELLE: What about your first fastest?

CRAIL: I'll keep that in case I need to hunt you down. My power and influence spreads far and wide, good sirs. Betraying my trust would be a fatal mistake.

DAMIEN: I would not even consider it, my liege.

(lights change, SGANARELLE and DAMIEN are riding hard)

DAMIEN: Ha Ha! What an old fool! He let us go and gave us gold and horses to boot!

SGANARELLE: Golden horses? They're black.

DAMIEN: Wha-- No, you idiot! Gold AND horses!

SGANARELLE: Ooooh. I thought you said golden hor--

DAMIEN: Enough! I'm surrounded by imbeciles.

SGANARELLE: Do you know which cathedral is closest? Should we be heading in this direction?

DAMIEN: Ho ho, my foolish friend. You too have been duped by my intellect, for I have no intention of completing that ridiculous quest for that buffoon.

SGANARELLE: What?! B-but sir, a quest to steal three pieces of a holy relic is a fine set-up for an adventure that lasts roughly ninety minutes!

DAMIEN: Structure be damned, I do what I want!

SGANARELLE: But it's a holy mission, and you swore an oath! Do you not fear the wrath of God?

DAMIEN: Damien Anto, Master Thief, fears not the wrath of any God, nor that of any wolfman, boogeyman, or any other silly imagining!

SGANARELLE: (*GASPS*) You... you Turk! I fear for your soul, my lord, every day!

DAMIEN: You fear much my pudgy, dumb friend. But do save yourself the trouble of all the trembling and let me do the thinking for the two of us.

SGANARELLE: Don't worry my Lord. You're not paying me enough to do your thinking.

(*SMERALDINA rides up behind them*)

DAMIEN: Um... is there a third rider behind us or doth my ears deceive me?

SGANARELLE: (*notices*) Ah! I don't know this or that about doth, but Smeraldina is chasing us, and she's catching up!

DAMIEN: Jumping Jehoshaphat!

SMERALDINA: My love! Return to me!

DAMIEN: How is this possible? We're riding like the wind! Why, her father gave us the second and third fastest hor-- wait, ok, now I see what's happening.

SGANARELLE: What do we do?

DAMIEN: Ride faster!

SGANARELLE: I don't wanna hurt the poor thing...

DAMIEN: Either you beat that horse half to death or I'll do it to you!

SGANARELLE: Well that's a particular predicament I'm inclined to believe may actually occur. Alright, come now horsey!

(spanks, horse whinnies)

SMERALDINA: You needn't fear my father, my love! He won't imprison you again, I promise!

DAMIEN: Lies! Lies from the mouth of a hideous demon! I cast you out demon, in the name of Christ!

SGANARELLE: I don't see Christ swooping down to help you anytime soon, my lord.

DAMIEN: Look who swoops to your left, Sganarelle!

SGANARELLE: Aah! She's upon us! Hand off my reigns, woman!

SMERALDINA: Tell your master to stop!

DAMIEN: Don't you dare tell me a thing, Sganarelle!

SMERALDINA: Tell him I forgive him and I wish to speak to my future husband!

DAMIEN: Tell that she-devil I'll do no such thing!

SMERALDINA: Tell your master I love him, and I wish to help him on his holy quest!

DAMIEN: Tell that witch I can hear her and I won't have ladies mucking up my thievery!

SGANARELLE: (There's too much to tell!)

DAMIEN: Alright, you know what?

(DAMIEN rides over, gets in a brawl with SMERALDINA, grabs her horse and throws it off stage)

SMERALDINA: My horse! You asshole!! *(runs offstage)*

SGANARELLE: You've done it sir! Such a display of fisticuffs I've not seen!

DAMIEN: Woah there! *(they slow)* Dismount! *(They dismount and throw their horses away)* We may only rest for but a moment. We need to get to Barcelona before dark.

SGANARELLE: You think she's still following us?

DAMIEN: Doubtful. But we've got a long night of thievery ahead of us.

SGANARELLE: Merciful heaven! Not even a night's rest? You can't take your mind off sin for an instant. A thief is never satisfied, I suppose.

DAMIEN: Now you're getting it. You're well on your way to becoming a master thief yourself, my ward.

SGANARELLE: Ward? Sir, I just want my wages.

DAMIEN: Fool. A thief has no wage. He steals for a living.

SGANARELLE: I am your *valet*, my lord. I carry your things, powder your face, announce you at fancy parties, *etcetera*. I am a good Catholic and I don't condone stealing.

DAMIEN: Fine, *valet*. Carry this gold then, or get a beating.

SGANARELLE: Yes sir.

DAMIEN: Perhaps a beating as well!

(DAMIEN begins to beat SGANARELLE)

SGANARELLE: Ack! Sir, please!

DAMIEN: Show me that wit of yours and correct me again why don't you?!

(More beating)

SGANARELLE: Ack! Sir, stop!

DAMIEN: Here's your wages! Here's a raise! And here's a bonus, yes! You've earned every penny!

SGANARELLE: Master-- AHH! I implore you, please-- AAACK!!

(lights down as DAMIEN chases SGANARELLE offstage, still beating him)

NARRATOR: And so our two heroes stole through the day and into the night, filling their saddlebags with loot, before settling on one last score... the robust Castell de Barcelona!

(lights up, DAMIEN sneaks through a house. SGANARELLE follows reluctantly, carrying far too many knick-knacks in his hands. DAMIEN piles more goods on top of him and SGANARELLE grunts. DAMIEN shushes him angrily. This repeats, then...)

DAMIEN: Egads!

SGANARELLE: AH!! What?

DAMIEN: I've just remembered... there's a candelabra I missed in the study.

SGANARELLE: My lord, I simply cannot carry anymore loot. If you pile much more on top of me I shall topple over and wake the residents!

DAMIEN: Ah Sganarelle, always the pessimist. You must believe in yourself if you're to ever rise up beyond your pitiful position. Remember what the old violinist use to say: Confidence, confidence, confidence!

SGANARELLE: I think it was "practice," my Lord.

DAMIEN: Pfft, what? No, that's stupid. Now hush! You'll wake the residents.

SGANARELLE: Sir, I clank and jangle with every step. I'm moving as silently as possible. (*almost falls*) Oh, sir, help me with this load or I shall lose it!

DAMIEN: Nonsense. Hold still. I've discovered an impressive marble bust of Molière.

SGANARELLE: Ack! No sir! Molière was renowned for his extremely large head!

DAMIEN: Very impressive bust, lifelike really. (*places on top of pile*)

SGANARELLE: Urk! My knees are shaking.

DAMIEN: Then put your back into it.

SGANARELLE: My back is aching!

DAMIEN: Then hurry out with it.

SGANARELLE: My feet are slipping!

DAMIEN: Then get new shoes.

SGANARELLE: I shall fall at any moment, sir!

DAMIEN: Don't you dare fall, Sganarelle. I shall beat you with my walking stick if you do.

(a clatter as a bowl falls to the ground)

DAMIEN: Ack! What was that?

SGANARELLE: I lost a dish, my lord. I can't see where I'm going.

DAMIEN: Idiot! You'll get us hanged!

SGANARELLE: But sir--

DAMIEN: You've earned yourself a fine whack for this. *(whack)*

SGANARELLE: Ack! Sir, don't!

DAMIEN: And another for your whining! *(whack)*

SGANARELLE: Ack, sir! Please, beat me later! (Never thought I'd hear myself say that.)

DAMIEN: *(hears something)* Wait... I hear footsteps!

(The COUNTESS enters with a large blunderbuss)

COUNTESS: Who is there? I can hear you two whispering in the dark. Here to take my marvelous bust, are you?

DAMIEN: Only an old lady. I'll give her a good knock.

COUNTESS: Don't you come any closer, I've got myself a blunderbuss!

SGANARELLE: Sir! Perhaps we should retreat?

DAMIEN: Quiet, let me talk our way out of this.

COUNTESS: You take me for some old demented fool? I've seen plenty of your type in my time... young men who use their charms to burglarize decent folk. You scoundrel! You miscreant!

SGANARELLE: She's got you pinned, my lord.

DAMIEN: With age cometh wisdom, I suppose.

COUNTESS: And wrath! Say goodbye to the world of the living, and tell the devil I'll see him soon!

(DAMIEN and SGANARELLE scream and dive to the ground as she fires.)

COUNTESS: *(beat)* Did... did I getcha? Hello? It's so damn dark in here.

SGANARELLE: Uh, yes, um... no need to reload. You've got us good!

DAMIEN: Yes, we're both dead now.

SGANARELLE: Well, dying. I'm dying very quickly due to... all the... injury I have sustained.

DAMIEN: There's so much blood, oh the humanity, oh, I wanted to die in France!

SGANARELLE: (You wanna die in France?)

DAMIEN: (Shh!)

COUNTESS: Well I best reload and fire again to be sure.

SGANARELLE and DAMIEN: Run!

DAMIEN: The loot, get the loot! (*starts shoveling it back into SGANARELLE's hands*)

SGANARELLE: Sir, alright-- Ok, ok, I've got enough, let's go!

COUNTESS: Almost there...

DAMIEN: The bust! Where's the bust!?

SGANARELLE: Oh come now, my lord! Molière was just some silly rabble-rouser, a heretic, and a fool! No one will remember his words. Leave it!

DAMIEN: But it's so large! He had such a large head!!

COUNTESS: (*finishes reloading*) Ah ha! Greed has gotten the better of you, my pretties. The pigs are gonna eat well this week!

DAMIEN: Sganarelle, shield me! (*grabs him*)

SGANARELLE: Hey, wait, let go!

DAMIEN: Fire when ready, madam.

SGANARELLE: Nonononono I'm not ready, I'm not ready!

JEZEBEL LA BELLE: Ha ha!

(*JEZEBEL leaps out of the shadows and knocks the COUNTESS out*)

DAMIEN: What? What happened, who's there?!

SGANARELLE: We've been saved! But by whom?

(*DAMIEN sniffs the air. SGANARELLE does the same.*)

DAMIEN: That smell. Fresh roses...

SGANARELLE: Rare vanilla...

DAMIEN: Exotic spices...

SGANARELLE: Morning dew...

DAMIEN: Oh no, its...

DAMIEN and SGANARELLE: Jezebel La Belle!

JEZEBEL: Thank you, my old friend, for distracting the Countess of Barcelona. I'll be taking this bust. (*shows bust*)

DAMIEN: My bust!

JEZEBEL: It'll go well with this candelabra I found in the study. (*shows candelabra*)

DAMIEN: My candelabra! You fiend. We do all the hard work and you come to pick the scraps?

JEZEBEL: That's no way to talk to a lady... especially one who just saved your life, Damien Anto. What is this, the third time I've snatched you from the jaws of Hades?

SGANARELLE: Fourth, I think.

DAMIEN: And each time I didn't require any snatching from any jaws. I am the master thief here. You're merely a pretender.

JEZEBEL: If you say so darling. But there's a reason why the jeweled crown of Attila sits in my lair and not yours. It's because I, Jezebel La Belle, Master Thief, am the finest criminal this side of the Steppe.

DAMIEN: Your ego always outweighed your talent.

SGANARELLE: I don't understand why you two don't like each other. You have so much in common.

JEZEBEL: I'll leave you the rest, as a token of my gratitude.

SGANARELLE: Why are *you* thanking *us*?

JEZEBEL: For your reliable role as patsies in my plan. I'm sure we'll see each other again, Damien. Try not to get yourself killed before then. (*laughs, flies away*)

SGANARELLE and DAMIEN: Where'd she go?!/How'd she do that?!

DAMIEN: That woman is infuriating.

SGANARELLE: Don't worry yourself over her, my lord. We've got plenty of treasure for ourselves. Let's count ourselves lucky for still having our lives, and go have a drink, eh?

DAMIEN: She thinks herself the master thief? Rubbish! What a laugh! I would be laughing, I mean, if it was funny, but it's not. It's just sad.

SGANARELLE: Yes my lord, whatever you say.

DAMIEN: And that line about being the best thief this side of the Steppe. She took that from me!

SGANARELLE: Yes my lord, whatever you say.

DAMIEN: Except mine was more clever. It was originally a pun. I would say "I'm the best thief for a million steps from the Steppe," or... wait, no that's not how it went. It was... wait...

SGANARELLE: Yes my lord, whatever you say.

DAMIEN: Either way, she's a fraud. And I must prove her a fraud. For society, you know. For honesty.

SGANARELLE: Yes my lord, you're always about honesty and all that.

DAMIEN: Yes, I always say, I'm an honest thief. So, I shall prove what a fraud she is and prove myself the true master!

SGANARELLE: Do you have a plan?

DAMIEN: Behold. I've recently received this letter from our old friend, Salty.

SGANARELLE: Oh yeah, Salty! How's he doing these days?

DAMIEN: Still quite salty. And he's found us an interesting lead. According to this, an anonymous financier is offering a hefty sum in reward for the Eye of Argon.

SGANARELLE: The what?

DAMIEN: It's a legendary jewel the size of your fist. (*punch*)

SGANARELLE: Ow! Yeah, I get it.

DAMIEN: It is obviously an expensive prize, but the gold this financier offers is even greater. Why, we could retire tomorrow if this works out.

SGANARELLE: We could? Oh joy of joys!

DAMIEN: Of course, we won't. Thievery is my life.

SGANARELLE: Yes... of course. What was I thinking.

DAMIEN: According to this, we must act quickly. It says here the financier has sent an identical letter to each of the finest thieves across the Mediterranean, each letter containing a copy of a map where the treasure is being held: The Grand Vault of Barcelona. We're not the only ones after the jewel. In fact, for all we know someone else may have already stolen it. We must seek the treasure immediately!

SGANARELLE: Sir, I'm exhausted.

DAMIEN: Hmm, yes. Perhaps it is time we utilized The Thinking Snuff.

SGANARELLE: Ah yes, The Thinking Snuff! Very good.

(SGANARELLE pulls out snuff and they do lines and get jacked up.)

DAMIEN: LET'S GOOOOOO!!

(lights change)

SGANARELLE: Sir, do you even know where we're going?

DAMIEN: There! You see its glistening dome, flashing pearl and sapphire in the moonlight? There she be. I've passed this impressive beast many times in my life, each time envisioning what it must look like inside, what magnificent treasures beyond imagination lay snuggled deep between her bowels.

SGANARELLE: Precisely what I was thinking, m'lord.

DAMIEN: Its allure is irresistible.

(MASCARILLE and JODELET enter and pose similarly to DAMIEN and SGANARELLE)

MASCARILLE: There! Did not I tell you, Jodelet? We have arrived, exactly as I had predicted.

JODELET: Of course, sir.

MASCARILLE: Let that teach you never to doubt me again!

JODELET: I don't think these bruises will let me forget anytime soon, my lord.

DAMIEN: Ah! Is that Lord Mascarille, my old rival?

MASCARILLE: *Monsieur!* It is Damien Anto, my brother in thievery!

DAMIEN: Good sir!

MASCARILLE: My friend!

(they kiss each others cheeks)

MASCARILLE: I can only surmise you have received the same missive as I, and have thus proceeded directly to our current whereabouts.

DAMIEN: Indeed, sir. Our mutual acquaintance Salty has been quite liberal with his dispatches.

MASCARILLE: It is so good to see you in fine health.

DAMIEN: And you remain the stunning reflection of gentlemanliness that I have known since my salad days.

MASCARILLE: There simply isn't anything for it.

DAMIEN: Quite so!

MASCARILLE: A duel, then?

DAMIEN: To the death?

MASCARILLE: Of course!

(they retreat to their valets and MASCARILLE fetches a rapier)

DAMIEN: Sganarelle, *mi espasa*.

SGANARELLE: What?

DAMIEN: My sword, give me my sword.

SGANARELLE: What sword, I don't have a sword.

DAMIEN: What?

SGANARELLE: We've never had a sword!

DAMIEN: Are you sure?

SGANARELLE: You have a walking stick. Were you thinking of your walking stick?

DAMIEN: Oh. Oh yes. I was. *(turns back to MASCARILLE)* My lord, a tragedy has occurred!

MASCARILLE: Egads, whatever do you mean?

DAMIEN: My worthless *valet* has misplaced my sword.

MASCARILLE: Not your *espasa*?!

DAMIEN: I'm afraid so. You seem to have me at an impolite disadvantage.

MASCARILLE: Well that simply will not do! Thankfully for us, my *valet* has been instructed to carry two swords, as well as two of everything, to ensure his ignorant peasant mind does not deprive me of a single luxury by accident.

(JODELET sighs and takes out another sword, which DAMIEN grabs)

DAMIEN: My friend, what a brilliant idea! I shall have to instruct Sganarelle to double his load henceforth.

SGANARELLE: What? No! Dammit!

MASCARILLE: And so we are ready, at last!

DAMIEN: Such a wondrous treasure would be ill-suited to being stolen without a fine duel performed in its name.

MASCARILLE: It has been far too long since I have indulged a fight to the death. How exciting!

DAMIEN: *Monsieur?*

MASCARILLE: My lord.

(They begin to fight in a dance-like, non-violent, silly manner.)

DAMIEN: Such a fine weapon, a luminous body. And perfectly balanced.

MASCARILLE: Of course it is balanced! It was stolen from Senior Valice de Valiere Valencia, the renowned unicycling matador.

DAMIEN: Impressive! *(does a fancy sword spin)*

MASCARILLE: Ah! I see you too have studied the ancient art of swordplay with the Trucial Sheikhs.

DAMIEN: And your style has clearly been influenced by the bludgeoneers of the Mughal Empire since last we met.

MASCARILLE: How perceptive! The Mughal bludgeoneers are quite *amateur* in their ambitions, but have some small wisdom to offer in the realm of combat aesthetics.

DAMIEN: And your frills, I must say, match your movements perfectly. It is as if they were cut specifically to be the exact length to compliment your grip without impeding your artistic freedom of expression.

MASCARILLE: And your gloves, how magnificent. They shine brightly, the perfect shade of late April moon, but they do not sacrifice the crucial aspect of gripiness.

DAMIEN: Gripiness is paramount! But...

(DAMIEN gets the upper hand and holds his sword to MASCARILLE's stomach)

DAMIEN: Perhaps they are too beautiful, as these April moons have drawn your eyes away from our encounter!

MASCARILLE: *Touche!* How wonderful!

DAMIEN: It appears I am the victor.

MASCARILLE: That you are, sir. And a what a pulchritudinous duel it was.

DAMIEN: Shall I deliver the killing blow?

MASCARILLE: But of course! It is only proper.

DAMIEN: Courteous to the last. An admirable example for us all.

MASCARILLE: Oh Damien, you've always had a way with rhetoric. *(to JODELET)* Jodelet! Come.

(JODELET comes over. MASCARILLE returns his sword and moves his valet to stand in the exact position he was just standing, in front of DAMIEN's sword.)

MASCARILLE: Oh, what shall I say?

DAMIEN: Perhaps... Parting is such sweet sorrow?

MASCARILLE: Nothing so cliché! (*clears throat*)
“Some evening made of rose and of mystical blue
A single flash will pass between us
Like a long sob, charged with farewells.”

DAMIEN: Exquisite! Baudelaire is quite in style.

(*DAMIEN stabs JODELET, who screams, bleeds all over and collapses in pain. MASCARILLE steps over his writing body to approach DAMIEN.*)

MASCARILLE: I simply could not forgive myself if we could not meet again soon!

DAMIEN: We are slaves to fate, are we not? Where a glistening prize awaits...
There is our meeting place.

(*They both bow dramatically. SGANARELLE looks horrified. Lights shift to inside the vault. They roam the place.*)

DAMIEN: As is clear to see, by this glorious and expensive set, I have lead us inside the vault using great talent and wit! Be on the lookout, Sganarelle. If that idiot Mascarille made it here there's no doubt other thieves about.

SGANARELLE: Sir... the air gets colder every second. My hair stands on end. I fear there's a bad omen in the aether. A miasma of evil!

DAMIEN: Superstitious nonsense. Why, it's likely the position of Venus that changes the air so. You must educate yourself on the movement of the planets, Sganarelle.

SGANARELLE: But sir, look! A rising spirit, cloaked in mist! Ack! We must turn back before it steals our souls!

DAMIEN: Not yet. I would recognise that mist anywhere. It is but an alchemist's trick. No doubt the figure that stands before us is none other than Alcandre the Magician!

ALCANDRE: Hahahehehehehhohoho!
How do you do, my friends of crime?
It looks like you're late to the game this time.
It is I, Alcandre, the marvelous thief
Who always escapes by the skin of his teeth
And grabs the most marvelous treasure of all
And vanishes - poof! - moving straight through a wall.
My powers are far beyond your understanding
Nature itself yields to my commanding
Now I will beat you with a flick of my wrist
And seize that ruby the size of a fist!

(DAMIEN punches SGANARELLE)

SGANARELLE: Ack, would you stop it?!

DAMIEN: We meet again Alcandre. I see you're still using your gifts for no good.

SGANARELLE: Heavens preserve us - A Mohammedan!! He conferences with unholy false-gods! How are we to fight the Devil's magic?! Which saint or martyr should I pray to? I think I still have a copy of my catechism... *(feels pockets, finds booklet)*

DAMIEN: I've already said, there's no such thing as magic.

ALCANDRE: So sure are you, little Damien Anto?
I'll show you just how far I can go
Observe, a vase, heavy and old,
And watch very closely, if you be bold
There! You see it? Starting to rise
You best turn around, if you be wise
Or suffer the wrath of Alcandre the Great

Stay where you stand and seal your own fate.
Hahahehehehhohoho!

SGANARELLE: Sir! He makes that ancient vase levitate! Look how it shimmies and wobbles toward us, threatening to break across our foreheads! *(opens book)* “Most holy St. Jude, today I ask that you pray for me and my intentions! State your intentions here, Amen!”

DAMIEN: A clever trick. But look! Ha ha!

(DAMIEN swings his cane above the vase, and it falls)

SGANARELLE: Sir! Have you excised the devil?

DAMIEN: No devil here. Just a few thin strands of Arabian Silk. See?

SGANARELLE: Ah, so it was only a trick?

ALCANDRE: Nonsense, you fools, I’ve only begun!
You’ve both been entrapped in the web that I’ve spun.
Look to your feet - they are heavy as lead
And there you’ll be stuck until you are dead!

SGANARELLE: Ack! He’s right, I can’t move an inch!
Master, please get us out of this pinch!

DAMIEN: Stop.

SGANARELLE: W-What?

DAMIEN: Stop it, don’t rhyme with him.

SGANARELLE: Apologies sir, it couldn’t be helped.

DAMIEN: One more rhyme and I’ll give you some welts! *(realizes)* God damn it.

ALCANDRE: Goodbye my rival, I wish you good luck
In dealing with whoever finds you so stuck. Hahahehehehoho!

DAMIEN: One moment, Alcandre. I've seen through this as well. You've merely concocted some type of glue and laid a trap for whoever came through. Luckily I have just the thing! *(pulls out an elixir, splashes on his shoes, and jumps free)*

SGANARELLE: My word! It wasn't magic, but just a sticky mucilage!

DAMIEN: You see, Sganarelle? I told you science wasn't useless.

ALCANDRE: You remain ever so the cleverest thief
To see through my charms and magic mischief.
But watch as I make a devil appear--

DAMIEN: Let's see you do that under a chandelier!

(DAMIEN releases a nearby rope and a chandelier falls and hits ALCANDRE)

SGANARELLE: Wonderful sir! You've crushed him under that hanging baroque lighting fixture! Clever and effective. Let no one say you don't have your moments.

DAMIEN: I would never let anyone speak against my personage without a smattering of proper *matraquage*.

SGANARELLE: Okay. Do you think he's dead?

ALCANDRE: Not quite. Though I'm not feeling right in the head.

SGANARELLE: Good, you magician you! Stay there and pray to God for forgiveness.

DAMIEN: We need to move. Such noise could have attracted undue attention.

SGANARELLE: But we're lost. Which way should we go?

DAMIEN: This way!

(DAMIEN runs offstage, SGANARELLE follows. They then re-enter.)

DAMIEN: Actually, this way!

(DAMIEN runs offstage, SGANARELLE follows. They then re-enter.)

DAMIEN: Very well. We're lost.

SGANARELLE: But at least you kept your confidence.

DAMIEN: Wait! There, through that hall. A pale glow.

SGANARELLE: But isn't that the moon?

DAMIEN: The clouds cover the sky tonight.

(The Eye of Argon, sitting on a pedestal, slides on stage)

SGANARELLE: Good Lord!

DAMIEN: That's it. The Eye.

SGANARELLE: How it shimmers, like water.

DAMIEN: And glows like a firefly. A more beautiful treasure I've not seen.

SGANARELLE: Surely, it must be of holy origin.

DAMIEN: Perhaps I should keep it for myself instead of turning it over to Salty. Such a prize would stymie the taunts of even Jezebell La Belle.

SGANARELLE: It truly is the size of a fist. *(DAMIEN punches him)* Ow, hey, come on!

DAMIEN: There's bound to be traps of some kind around here. Stay here and keep a lookout. I shall venture forward.

SGANARELLE: A fantastic idea sir.

DAMIEN: Fantastic, you say? Hmmm... now, for some reason, I feel I must change it. On second thought, you go first.

SGANARELLE: What?! B-but sir! You're the master thief!

DAMIEN: And you are my *valet*, so do as I command. Forward!

SGANARELLE: Uuugh... Dear Lord, punish me not for stealing this jewel. For I am not truly stealing it - I'm merely following the orders of my master, who will steal it, after I lift it from its altar. Surly lifting isn't a sin.

(SGANARELLE proceeds carefully. Then we hear a snap, and an unraveling)

SGANARELLE: What was that?!

(A cage falls on SGANARELLE)

SGANARELLE: Ack! Sir, I'm trapped! Help!

DAMIEN: Just as I thought. Now, the Eye is mine! Ha ha!

(DAMIEN steps forward, another snap, another cage falls and traps DAMIEN)

DAMIEN: Egads! What is this?!

SGANARELLE: Great. Now we're both trapped.

DAMIEN: Two cages... two cages! Who guards their treasure with two of the same trap? Quick Sganarelle, free yourself so you may free me.

SGANARELLE: Sir, I don't know how! (*struggles to lift cage*)

DAMIEN: This is an order. Escape and free me. If you don't, I shall have to beat you, and lower your wages as well!

SGANARELLE: No, sir! Please! I don't know how to escape!

DAMIEN: You layabout! I'll show you what for-- (*raises cane, struggles to reach SGANARELLE*) Well. I cannot reach you so now you will have to beat yourself.

SGANARELLE: Sir, please!

DAMIEN: Now, Sganarelle! Take my stick. (*throws to him*) Don't hold back now.

(*SGANARELLE starts to beat himself*)

SGANARELLE: Ow! Arg!

DAMIEN: Harder!

SGANARELLE: I'm beating myself pretty hard, sir!

DAMIEN: Not hard enough. I shall have to give you another beating later to make up for it.

SGANARELLE: May I stop then?

DAMIEN: Keep going, it helps me think. (*whacking continues*) How frustrating. This is all your fault, Sganarelle!

SGANARELLE: How is this my fault?!

DAMIEN: If you hadn't of made that off-hand comment praising my original plan as flawless, I would have gotten trapped in the first cage, and you would have still been free, therefore still able to free me from that cage.

SGANARELLE: What?

DAMIEN: I shall have to withhold your wages for another fortnight as punishment.

SGANARELLE: But sir! My family, they're sick, they need money--

DAMIEN: Quiet, I can't think with all this noise!

JEZEBEL: (*flies in*) Careful my love, you'll strain yourself.

DAMIEN and SGANARELLE: GASP! Jezebel La Belle!

JEZEBEL: In the flesh. The smooth, silky flesh.

DAMIEN: Damn you! This is your doing, isn't it?

JEZEBEL: Not at all. I merely stood in the shadows, waiting for you two to bumble your way through those traps. Now the path is clear for *mois*. Many thanks, old friend - Once again you've secured my treasure for me.

DAMIEN: When I get out of this mess I'll get my revenge. Mark my words!

JEZEBEL: If you manage to avoid the noose, you mean? (*she takes the Eye*) Ah yes... the booty is mine. Farewell Damien Anto. I'm sure we'll meet again - in this life, or the next! Ha ha ha! (*flies out*)

SGANARELLE: (*beat*) Would you like me to read from my catechism, master? After all, we will most likely be seeing The Lord sooner rather than later.

DAMIEN: I cannot die without my sweet justice against Jezebel. Worry not, Sganarelle. We'll escape. Or at least, I'll escape.

SGANARELLE: My worries are at ease, master.

NARRATOR: Is this the end for our roguish duo? Will the Master Thief be able to steal his freedom, or will the hangman cut himself two new pairs of ears?

(SGANARELLE and DAMIEN ad lib disgust and horror at this remark)

NARRATOR: Come back after intermission for more rollicking adventures with Damien Anto, Master Thief! *(Lights down)*

[I N T E R M I S S I O N]

ACT 2

(Lights up. DAMIEN runs across the stage. SGANARELLE follows, out of breath and slower)

SGANARELLE: Master Anto! Damien, sir! Slow your pace, I pray thee!

(DAMIEN enters again and runs across the stage, past SGANARELLE, who tries to keep up)

SGANARELLE: Sir, wait! Please! Don't leave me, your faithful *valet*, behind in this dark wood!

(DAMIEN comes back around)

DAMIEN: Oh, Sganarelle. I'd forgotten were still back there. Very well. This exercise is not good for my complexion. Let us rest behind this mighty sycamore and take solace in the quality of its opacity to shield us from the gaze of any who might have dared to follow our escape in hopes of happening upon us unaware.

SGANARELLE: Well said sir. Oh, such a night we've had, and such a day before! I am still struck with awe when remembering the contrivances that lead us here. I

must inquire, master, as you continue to impress me with your roguish skills - How were you able to dress as a woman while locked in the stockade, hands and feet bound in irons? And by what means were you to procure such dresses that would hide our manly figures and pass us as ladies of the red quarter? And the garments fit, by God! Have I ever once told you my dress size?

DAMIEN: Mine eyes could size a woman's bust from miles away, my fretful *valet*. Worry not your fat head with my brilliance. Be satisfied in knowing that they never execute women on Sundays, and thus we were able to make our escape from that blasted stockade.

SGANARELLE: But sir, I have not even scraped the surface of my questioning! How did you seduce thirty guardsmen? And how did you manage to find Leonardo's designs for that bird-like gliding contraption? And where did you find the materials, prepared and neatly organized specifically for building it? And who taught you how to pilot such a monstrosity?!

DAMIEN: You seem to forget with whom you are speaking to. It is I, Damien Anto, Master Thief! The cunning and magnificent! The handsome and bold! The ever-fleeing, always-thieving, sight-seeing, wall-leaping, record-beating, maiden-cheating, ever-scheming vagabond and grandest criminal ever to trot the hot sands of Zanzibar, or France, or any place really, there doesn't have to be sand.

SGANARELLE: I believe at least half of that is true, sir.

DAMIEN: The only thing that matters now is that we have escaped the hangman's noose during intermission. Accept that all of this happened thusly and you simply can't comprehend the details. However the situation resolved, here we are, in this forest, tangled in new predicament, seafarers tacking on the winds of fate, with many more adventures to be had! Now come - my faith in the opacity of this sycamore is waning. (*taps tree*) I don't even think it's real.

SGANARELLE: There may be a cottage of some kind ahead, my lord, if the smoke rising over the setting sun is any indication.

DAMIEN: In my years of thievery I have learned the hard way not to trust indications. We shall go the opposite direction.

SGANARELLE: What? N-no sir, please, let us investigate at least.

DAMIEN: Wait. *(sniffs)* What is that, on the wind? *(sniffs)* A smell.

SGANARELLE: My nose has long been bad, master. Too many beatings.

DAMIEN: Yes, rabbit stew, with fresh vegetables. Delicious! My nose never lies. I trust it or any other appendage of mine over you, Sganarelle. Let us follow these nostrils and see where they lead.

SGANARELLE: Whatever you say, sir.

(They sniff their way offstage. Lights change to a cottage with GUSMAN outside gathering wood. The two rogues enter.)

DAMIEN: There, I knew it! A cottage, with smoke coming from its chimney.

SGANARELLE: Oh, what a surprise.

DAMIEN: And look - an old man, gathering firewood from the pile outside. See how his knees wobble beneath the weight? A simple thing to knock him out and take what we need. Then, onto the next cottage, and the next!

SGANARELLE: B-but sir! What about shelter? Shouldn't we stay here and lay low? Surely we are wanted men. The crime of thievery is but nothing compared the the crime of impersonating a lady.

DAMIEN: Fine, so we clobber the old man, eat his food, take his valuables and head straight to Stotzengruber for pretzels and beer - far from the jurisdiction of those bumbling fools I seduced.

SGANARELLE: *(frustrated)* Gah! Sir- *(collects himself)* might I perhaps implore you to listen to a suggestion I have just now come up with?

DAMIEN: Only because you asked so nice.

SGANARELLE: Perhaps we approach the old man and not clobber him, but instead claim to be travelers, which we are, and we just ask politely to spend the night next to his fire, perhaps share a bite to eat. Then we lay low for a couple days and help him tend to his house and garden. Then we depart as friends, finally heading to Stotzengruber for pretzels and beer.

DAMIEN: Interesting. But at what point do we steal everything he owns?

SGANARELLE: We don't. We trick him into thinking we're good people. And then leave. With him still believing that.

DAMIEN: And then the pretzels and beer.

SGANARELLE: Sure!

DAMIEN: I could always bash him if this doesn't go our way. Very well, we will try this new strategy. Follow my lead and let me do the talking.

SGANARELLE: Of course, master.

DAMIEN: Here, hold my walking stick.

SGANARELLE: Of course, master.

DAMIEN: And powder my nose before we approach.

SGANARELLE: Of course, master.

(GUSMAN monologues to himself as DAMIEN and SGANARELLE prepare.)

GUSMAN: Oh, my old back! I gotta get this wood inside 'fore my soup scorches, but my body betrays me with every step. These knees, which once whisked me forward toward my lover's heaving bosom, now creak and pop with every aching

step, serving as a constant reminder of happier days when I was but a spry spring chicken. Now I couldn't bed even the most sedentary of women. Oh, oh my feet! My aching feet! Where once they would fly like sweet doves across the meadows of youthful abundance, caressing the leaves of grass with secret passion, now they are but dusty gnarled crooked callouses, and any innocent blade of grass that would come across them would be cloven in twain. Woe is me! What ointment or salve could save this old body from the horrors of time and age?

DAMIEN: Excuse us, and good evening, gentle sir. My name is Da--

GUSMAN: Oh! My neck! My oooold neck! Which once held my head high and proud as a marble statue, now it sags and wobbles like a dead tulip. Each time I turn this neck, I hear the church bells pound in my skull as if a grim premonition of my own funeral. And oh, my knees, these damned old knees...

DAMIEN: Yes, your knees, we've already heard about your knees. But sir, let me introduce myself--

GUSMAN: Who's there? My eyes aren't what they used to be. Where once they glistened with life, open and loving to the world--

DAMIEN: That's nice. Listen. Let us help you with that wood, yes? Here.

GUSMAN: Oh! Give that back, you scoundrel! Thief, thief! Help! Somebody help--

SGANARELLE: No no no no! Sir, we are trying to help. Let my lord Anto carry the sticks, I pray thee. And here, take my arm. We will lead you inside to your surely-scorched soup.

GUSMAN: Oh, my soup! I had forgotten. Thank you young sirs, I apologize for my cantankerous mien. You see, I am old.

(DAMIEN and SGANARELLE ad lib understanding. They all exit. Lights change, and they re-enter.)

DAMIEN: Worry not, very old man. We shall tend your fire and your soup. Have a seat.

GUSMAN: Bless you good sirs, I shall. (*sits*) It is rare that such kind travelers do come upon my humble hovel here among the fake sycamores.

DAMIEN: Yes, travelers we are, heading to Stotzengruber.

GUSMAN: For pretzels and beer?

DAMIEN: (*surprised*) Yes.

SGANARELLE: Here, let me serve you some soup, my friend.

GUSMAN: Please, serve yourselves as well. There is plenty.

SGANARELLE: You are too kind. But let me tell you how we came upon your cottage. You see, we were lost in the woods and with the cold night approaching we hastened to the smoke from your chimney in hopes of finding shelter.

GUSMAN: You are welcome to stay the night if it pleases you. It has been ages since I've had company. Please, let me show you around the place. (*gets up with difficulty*) This room here is the kitchen, the study, the main hall, and the bedroom. Outside is the bathroom, but you've already seen that. And that's it. (*sits*) Most of my belongings I keep organized in piles. There's my clothing pile, and over there is my tool pile, and next to that is my bed pile.

SGANARELLE: A lovely bunch of piles, sir.

DAMIEN: You're all alone out here, are you?

GUSMAN: Yes, I'm able to do what little I can to survive. None are left to care about this old coot. When my body is unable to lay traps for the rabbits and make rabbit stew, I shall surely starve. And none would know the difference.

DAMIEN: Charming. And do you keep any heirlooms? Anything to leave for the scholars to find?

SGANARELLE: Damien, sir, perhaps such questions are unbecoming of a strange guest...?

GUSMAN: No, that's all right. It is natural to wonder what worth such an old man has to leave the world. I only have but one thing of value to my name. It is there, the old silver snuff box. It belonged to my second wife. She was a snuff fiend. Took her life in the end. Snuffed out of existence.

DAMIEN: Silver, you say. Valuable, you say. Steal it, you say.

SGANARELLE: Sir, you are thinking out loud again!

GUSMAN: What was that? Damn these ears! When once they were hairless, pink, and sensitive as a spanked baby, now they are as clogged as the catacombs of *Paris*!

SGANARELLE: Excuse us for a moment. Damien, may I speak to you?

DAMIEN: Very well.

(they walk across the room)

DAMIEN: What's gotten into you?!

SGANARELLE: Sir! That snuffbox is all this man has left. It's hardly worth a thing. Its sides are tarnished and dented. Surely you wouldn't reward this man's generosity with stealing his dead wife's trinket?

DAMIEN: Pah! What pious nonsense. It's silver, Sganarelle. And still slightly shiny. You know I collect snuff boxes, as every modern gentleman does. And he's old, and blind, and deaf, and dumb - a better mark could not be known!

SGANARELLE: What if the authorities show up? This trustworthy old man could provide us a cover story. He must be alive, amiable, and on our side.

DAMIEN: You do not understand, Sganarelle. This need that writhes within the depths of my bowels, rilling my humors into a torrent. That snuffbox... I can feel it. It communes with me through the aether. How it sings to me, Sganarelle, through battered silver sides, imploring me to add it to my voluminous list of conquests. Thievery is the lifeblood that burns through my veins! I could not deny my nature anymore than you could deny your need to sleep, or breath, or eat. Would you implore a fish not to swim? Would you demand a bird not soar through the sky? Would you sneer at the baker for smelling of dough? Would you berate the painter for his colorful pants?

SGANARELLE: I would certainly scorn you for stealing this man's prized snuffbox! We are guests in his home. To betray hospitality is to invoke the wrath of the Lord himself, and I think you're walking a fine line in that regard as it is.

DAMIEN: No God holds sway over Damien Anto, Master Thief. Neither does any other fairy tale.

SGANARELLE: GASP! Sir! Please, for your own sake, hold your heretical tongue. If you do not believe in holy truth, then you must at least believe in human decency. What does this miserable old man have to live for but his dented little snuffbox?

DAMIEN: Hmph. I suppose you're right. It would be exceptionally atrocious of me to steal such a mediocre prize from such a pathetic creature.

SGANARELLE: Truly, sir? You are agreeing with me?

DAMIEN: I am allowed, am I not?

SGANARELLE: Of course sir! Allowed and encouraged!

DAMIEN: Your plea has moved my tender heart. I have decided that I will spare this man and his little snuff box.

SGANARELLE: Splendid, sir, splendid! I shall make us a fine bed-pile of our own to sleep on tonight, and trust me when I say we will awaken tomorrow morn' with fresh faces and unburdened hearts.

DAMIEN: I want my own bed pile, I'm not sharing a bed pile with you.

SGANARELLE: Of course, sir.

DAMIEN: And I want mine to be noticeably nicer than yours.

SGANARELLE: Of course, sir.

(Lights down)

NARRATOR: And so the trio slept through the night. Then, the sun, that glistening chariot of Apollo, snuck up through the window and kissed Sganarelle gently upon the lips, waking him from his restful slumber.

(Lights fade up)

SGANARELLE: (*Yawns, stretches*) Oh sir, oh my good sir, what a beautiful morning, and what a glorious dawn God has given us - and oh what a marvelous dream I had! I dreamt we were two tadpoles, and we swam together in a warm pond, and we grew and grew until we sprouted legs and hopped off to a frog wedding and all our tadpole friends were there, and we all drank and sang old war songs. Then I dreamt we were clouds, and you were dark and full of rain, and oh so sore and bothersome with complaining, and so I tickled you and you wet your load onto the earth, where flowers sprang and shouted "Hallelujah!" and you laughed, and so did I, and we disappeared into the stars where a passing comet said "How-do-you-do!" And then I dreamt I was alone on an island, and a violent storm was approaching, but then a white-sailed ship ran aground, and it was you, not on the ship, but you *were* the ship! And your sails bent down and lifted me aboard and before I knew it we were sailing towards those waterfalls at the ends of the earth, and down there in the blackness was a whistle of a nightingale, and we jumped together into eternity. Sir, oh sir! Uh, sir? What's

this?! A bed pile, significantly nicer than mine, and it is empty! My master must be outside making water. I must tell him of my dreams before they fly from my mind-- Wait, no, wait! -- Yeah they're gone.

GUSMAN: Oh good morning young one, I was just about to--

(Knocking)

GUSMAN: Oh! There's someone at the door. Let me hoist my ancient body from this mountaneous ziggurat of slumberance. *(attempts to rise)* Ack! Oh, my aching back, which once did--

(Aggressive knocking)

SGANARELLE: I'll get it, good sir. Perhaps it is my master. Let's see here.

(SGANARELLE goes to the door and opens it. Constables bust in.)

CONSTABLE: What ho!

SGANARELLE: Ack! Who are you?!

CONSTABLE: In the name of King Louis the Umpteenth, we are here to search your premises for fugitives from the law!

SGANARELLE: My word! (What ever shall I do?! I have neither the wit nor vocabulary to expertly weasel my way out such a vicissitudinous fluctuation of circumstances!) Uuuh... Fugitives from the law did you say?

CONSTABLE: Yes. I said that. I *just* said that.

SGANARELLE: You aren't by chance looking for a roguish rascalion named Damien Anto and his trusted *valet* Sganarelle D'Acklamede who recently burgled the palaces, taverns, and vaults of Barcelona only to be captured, locked in the stockade and then escape justice through a cavalcade of confusing and convoluted contrivances?

CONSTABLE: (*looks at paper*) That matches my description perfectly.

SGANARELLE: Never heard of them! You need not search this residency for they are not here nor were they ever here. The only person who lives here is a little old man.

CONSTABLE: Hmmm... That might be true. But then who are you? You aren't an old man, nor are you little.

SGANARELLE: Oh yes. You are correct sir. I understand that that may seem, uh, a little suspicious, but...

CONSTABLE: Well?

SGANARELLE: I assure you, although I am here, and suspicious, I am not an old man.

CONSTABLE: What?

SGANARELLE: I mean, I'm suspicious, and young, but not a thief.

CONSTABLE: The captain would recognise you if you were one of the fugitives. Come with us, we'll sort this thing out.

SGANARELLE: No, no, please, I must... stay.

CONSTABLE: What? Are you resisting arrest?

SGANARELLE: No, no! I just... don't want to go.

CONSTABLE: (*Beat. Then he motions to the others*) Boys.

SGANARELLE: Wait, no, what are you-- you won't need those, please-- ACK!

(The officers start beating SGANARELLE, who falls to the ground. GUSMAN has finally managed to rise from his bed-pile and walks to them.)

GUSMAN: Ooh, what's all this?! Stop, stop, stop! That there is my guest, and as a firm believer in the sanctity of hospitality I demand that you cease your bludgeonings this instant!

(they stop)

SGANARELLE: Oh thank you sir! Thank you!

CONSTABLE: You're the old man who lives here I take it?

GUSMAN: It's true. I've been here for 47 years, so many I've lost count. When once my mind was as sharp as a scythe, now it is but a rusted butter knife, not able to cut even the warmest of hay. When once I lived among the youthful in blissful ignorance of my painful and lonely future, now all I know is the constant--

CONSTABLE: Yeah, you're old, okay, we get it. But who's this then?

GUSMAN: This is my friend and honored house guest who helps me clean and cook and bring in wood. Who are you to come in here and beat him so? Like a bunch of street ruffians!

CONSTABLE: Uh, yes, well, we were only trying to-- you see, there are dangerous thieves about.

GUSMAN: The only criminals I see around here are you villains! So quick to unlatch your billy clubs and bring them to bare on innocent men. Never in my life have I seen such brazen rascaliontude! And among the authorities no less. Why in my time--

CONSTABLE: All right, very well, that's enough. We will leave you gentlemen be and take our search elsewhere. *(they turn to leave)*

SGANARELLE: Oh thank you sir, your words have saved my life.

CONSTABLE: (*turns back, clears throat*) I feel I must apologize in some greater way before I take my leave. You see, I am an honorable man and respected constable from a family of honorable and respectable constables. Here - let me share with you both the pleasure of this fine and rare Arabian Snuff. It is sure to send your heads spinning into a haze of colors. Try it, and accept my sincere regret.

GUSMAN: Thank you for your kind offer. It seems there is a gentlemen inside of that barrel chest of yours. However, we must decline. I have sworn off the snuff since the death of my dear wife Rebeccabeth. She snuffed herself into an early grave, leaving me only the fading memory of her inflamed nostrils, and her prized snuffbox. I keep it right over here-- wait a minute.

SGANARELLE: What?

GUSMAN: Gadzooks! Mother, Mary, and Joseph, I am flabbergasted!

CONSTABLE: What is it?

GUSMAN: My silver snuffbox... My argent rememberancer! The only shimmering light amongst the ever creeping shadow of death that consumes my every moment! Someone has stolen it!!

SGANARELLE: (No! Could this be the work of my currently absent master?!) S-stolen you say? No, it can't be. You've merely misplaced it my friend.

GUSMAN: (*turns on SGANARELLE*) You!! For decades that snuffbox stood as still as my wife's corpse. You show up last night in a huff and next morning my snuffbox is gone! And where is that Damien friend of yours? Did he make off with it whilst I slept innocently in my bedpile?!

CONSTABLE: Damien! So, there was another man. And he has the same name as one of the escaped thieves.

SGANARELLE: No! It must be some type of terrible coincidence!

GUSMAN: Beat him, constable! He is a snake and a liar and surely the thief you are looking for!!

SGANARELLE: No no wait wait wait--!!

(They rush SGANARELLE and beat him into the ground. Lights down)

NARRATOR: And so the Constable and his boys did as the old man requested, afterwards locking Sganarelle up in their jail trolley and ushering their horses back towards the hangman's noose.

(Lights up on SGANARELLE in a jail trolley. He signs a sorrowful tune.)

DRIVER: Hey, would you shut up back there? I'm trying to enjoy the weather! Stupid prisoners, always so damn depressed.

DAMIEN: Ha ha!

(DAMIEN swings up on the trolley and knocks out the driver, throwing him onto the ground.)

SGANARELLE: Heavens above! Who's there?

DAMIEN: It's me! I've saved you Sganarelle! *(jumps to the back and picks the lock of the cage in an instant)*

SGANARELLE: Oh, Damien! Wonder of wonders! I'm so glad to see you! *(jumps out of trolley)* I thank you very much for freeing me from this doom... but I must say, I remain conflicted. We were honest guests of our host the Old Man, and my scheme to behave honestly would have worked out perfectly, but you ruined it for no reason. Literally no reason at all!

DAMIEN: *Au contraire* my menial minion. I told you that thievery is my lifeblood, yet you insisted with your condescension. So I stole the trinket as you slept and

lead the authorities to the cottage deliberately. Let this be a lesson not to deny me my satiation. (*moves to steal the trolley*)

SGANARELLE: You... you fiend! A lesson? My God! I'd leave you if I could, my cruel master, but then... Who would pay my wages?

(*stupid comedy sound*)

DAMIEN: Hop on, Sganarelle, or I'll leave you to the wolves.

(*SGANARELLE joins him*)

SGANARELLE: Do you still have the snuff box or have you already pawned it? I hope you could at least fetch a decent price as it was the last prized possession of a man without friends or family to comfort him in his waning years.

DAMIEN: Oh no I have it here. But its brilliance seems somewhat diminished now that it has been properly purloined. Hardly worthy of a master thief such as myself.

SGANARELLE: Oh master! Perhaps we could return it to the old man, and--

DAMIEN: Hup! (*throws it over his shoulder*)

SGANARELLE: GAH! NO! WHAT! WHY!

DAMIEN: Come, my ward! Adventure and pretzels await in Stutzengruber. Tally ho! Haha, yes!

(*Lights change to DAMIEN and SGANARELLE sitting at a table eating pretzels and drinking beer. They murmur with delight, until...*)

DAMIEN: Egads!

SGANARELLE: Ahh!! What?!

DAMIEN: I've spilled beer on my *pantalones*.

SGANARELLE: I think you've had enough, sir. First you were throwing pretzels at innocent passersby, and now this.

DAMIEN: Nonsense, my teetotaling *valet*. Pretzel throwing is a fine Stotzengruber tradition.

SGANARELLE: But that's not why we're here, is it?

DAMIEN: Of course not. This city is the site of a wonder of the world I have dreamed of beholding since I was but a young kleptomaniac. I have traveled far and escaped many dangers all in the hopes that I may attend mass here at the Cathedral of St. Michael of the Rocks.

SGANARELLE: GASP! Truly? (At last my master has decided to confess his sins and repent his wicked ways!) But sir, why did we have to come all the way to this Alpine hamlet whilst you remained stubbornly steadfast in your skepticism? For as long as I've known you you've been a proud sinner and... **AGNOSTIC**.

DAMIEN: This particular *duomo* fosters an inner coating of golden treasures. It's the richest reliquary this side of the Vatican! There is no finer place for a thief than snuggled deep within the bowels of God.

SGANARELLE: Oh, I should have guessed. Now you're robbing Cathedrals? I thought we agreed they were, how you say, off limits!?

DAMIEN: I don't recall agreeing to any such ridiculousness.

SGANARELLE: Sir, when we were tasked with stealing away the shards of the Lance of Longinus in order to collect them as a wedding gift to present to the father of your bride to be, the tragically disfigured daughter of Lord Crail Princelington of Serendipo, the young Smeraldina, I only agreed because first, it was a solemn promise made to get us out of a rightly earned prison cell, and second, because I thought we were stealing from *Lutherans*.

DAMIEN: You are my *valet*, Sganarelle. You are here to serve me in my gentlemanly pursuits, including but not limited to wooing women, going to jail, making promises I don't intend to keep, and yes, stealing from the rich to give to the... myself.

SGANARELLE: But sir - To steal from a Cathedral's reliquary is to steal from God!

DAMIEN: I fear no other-worldly retribution. My cleverness has seen through the scheme of religion. Your faith is only a trick used by the powerful to pick from your pockets.

SGANARELLE: ACK! More blasphemy! Please, my master, can't we just steal from the rich of Stotzengruber? Surely these Germans have plenty of fine wares and trinkets to catch your fancy.

DAMIEN: I'm afraid my fancy has already been irrevocably caught. There is one item in particular...

SGANARELLE: Please sir, I pray thee!

DAMIEN: The iron head of the Lance of Longinus!

SGANARELLE: But we can't-- wait, what?

DAMIEN: You heard me. I will not repeat myself whilst hot pretzels still lie in wait upon my plate. (*eats pretzel violently*)

SGANARELLE: The Lance of Longinus! The fabled Spear of Destiny! So we *are* going to fetch the pieces for the Princelington family. Oh Damien sir, I knew there had to be a good bone left in your body. You were simply too proud to show it.

DAMIEN: What? What are you talking about?

SGANARELLE: Sir, I... I literally just explained this to you like thirty seconds ago. About how Smeraldina Princelington is betrothed to you and how her father demanded you collect the shards of The Lance? Remember? Act 1?!

DAMIEN: Oh yeah. I hadn't made the connection. No matter. I intend to sell the speartip on the black market.

SGANARELLE: ACK once more! I cannot in good conscience help you steal from God's home. I will have no part in this!

DAMIEN: That's all right, Sganarelle. I was going to ask you to obtain two healthy horses and be ready by the western bell tower, but upon second thought, you can just stay right here.

SGANARELLE: Oh? Truly, sir?

DAMIEN: Yes, by all means! Stay right here and enjoy the rest of the afternoon. Of course, you'll be fired, fined for your forfeiture of contract, and the eight months back-pay I owe you and your sickly family would be forgotten.

SGANARELLE: Uugh, I should have seen that coming.

DAMIEN: I have business to attend to. You may linger and weigh the pros and cons of letting your fourteen children live in crushing, shoeless destitution until they slowly starve to death because their fat-headed father was too self-righteous to do his job. Ta-ta! (*hops away*)

SGANARELLE: Wait, are you even going to pay the bill?! (*He's gone.*) Oooh dear Jesus Christ! Far too much lays upon my soul as it is for me to participate in such a horrid quest... but if I lose Damien as a patron, I'm done for. Wait, I've got it! I will confess what sins I have, commit this vile desecration, then confess again quickly thereafter! Yes! A sin quickly confessed is a sin quickly absolved. Brilliant! I can't believe no one's ever thought of this before. It's almost like you can do anything you want and get away with it. Huh.

(*lights change to SGANARELLE in a confessional booth*)

SGANARELLE: Bless me father for I have sinned.

PRIEST: How many days has it been since your last confession?

SGANARELLE: Six score and nineteen days, father.

PRIEST: I see. So you haven't been to church in several years then?

SGANARELLE: Uuuuuh No. More like four months.

PRIEST: Ah, yes, four months, I knew that. So tell me, child... is your tithe current?

SGANARELLE: Tithe? Oh dear me... it isn't, I'm sorry to say.

PRIEST: Yes, you're overdue forty crowns and four months late. That means we'll have to add on 30 crowns in late fees, and this cathedral charges a 10 crown administration fee, so.

SGANARELLE: Oh heavens! All I have to my name are these three bent brass pennies allowed to me to obtain horses for my master. Will the church accept these as a promissory of future installments?

PRIEST: No. But that's a fine hat you have there. Perhaps such a hat could fetch a fine price. Please put it in the slot.

SGANARELLE: My hat? It was a gift from my wife!

PRIEST: God is above us just as a husband is above his wife.

SGANARELLE: Oooh, you're right. Here, take it then. (*shoves into slot*)

PRIEST: Yeah, just, just shove it in the slot there...

SGANARELLE: There. Now will you hear my confession?

PRIEST: Of course, my son. The love of God is free to all.

SGANARELLE: For the past two years I have been a willing accomplice in many great crimes.

PRIEST: Great, you say? How great?

SGANARELLE: Oh, very, very great! I am the *valet* of a regionally famous burglar and con-man. I've aided in his every transgression against the laws of man and God alike.

PRIEST: I see. Go on. Tell me how great his crimes were.

SGANARELLE: But I'm not a wicked man, I swear it! I've done it all for my family. I only endure the shame and sin of my position to send what little my master pays me back to my wife and fourteen children.

PRIEST: And you've been doing this for two years, you say? You left your wife alone to care for fourteen children by herself for two whole years?

SGANARELLE: I was driven to my sin through desperation, so it's not really my fault, right? It's like... *society*, you know?

PRIEST: A wife unattended by her husband... how terrible.

SGANARELLE: Oh yes, terrible, terrible...

PRIEST: Who knows what trouble she could get herself into?

SGANARELLE: T-trouble? Whatever do you mean, Father?

PRIEST: Without the husband as the head of the house, women know not what to do. For it is written, their inferior minds driven by unchecked emotion and impure lust may drive them into the arms of any passerby without proper supervision from a male authority. And young children without the loving

influence of their father during their formative years leads to the breeding of criminals, hooligans, and protestants. We in the Church have always known this. Yet you leave your home and the woman whom God hath given you to gallivant abroad with a world-famous thief, stealing money and using it to purchase pleasures of the flesh! Why I can smell the pretzels and beer on you through this wicker thingy.

SGANARELLE: No father, it's not true! I mean yes, I was just enjoying pretzels and beer, but I'm a good Catholic, I swear! I'm so sorry father, please, please forgive me. For the sake of my wife and children, I beg of you, help me! (*sobbing*)

PRIEST: Hmm. Yes... I can see this guilt weighs upon you like a sack o' bricks.

SGANARELLE: It does...

PRIEST: Big ol' sack.

SGANARELLE: It does!

PRIEST: Big ol' sack of bricks. You know deep down this is all your fault. That you're a horrible sinner and that you walk the path of Satan.

SGANARELLE: Oh, what do I do? What can I do?!

PRIEST: I will absolve you of your sins, my child. But first you must say *one million* Hail Marys.

SGANARELLE: W-WHAT?!

PRIEST: ONE MILLION! Your sins are so great and so terrible, there simply is nothing for it but this: You must fall to your knees right now and sing one million Hail Marys in a row, without food or water. This, and only this, will calm God's wrath and put you back into His good graces.

SGANARELLE: B-but Father... A million-- without food or wa-- Surely there must be another wa--

PRIEST: The dark shadow of Lucifer hangs over you even now! His hand clutches at your soul and makes you delay - he whispers cowardice into your ear, and stokes the selfish flames of your heart!

SGANARELLE: No! I can feel it... I can feel Satan! Father, I'm afraid!

PRIEST: You must do ONE MILLION HAIL MARYS RIGHT NOW!

SGANARELLE: Oh, Jesus Christ, forgive me! (*falls to his knees*) Hail Mary, mother of God, blessed art thou--

PRIEST: Hahahahahahaha!! Stop, stop, stop, Sganarelle, stop, I can't, I can't take it anymore! (*jumps out of booth*) Come on, get up you hatless idiot, you greasy jester you! If I laugh much more I will soon mess my britches!

SGANARELLE: Wait... No. That voice... could it be?! (*jumps out of booth*)

DAMIEN: (*removes fake beard*) Ha-ha!

SGANARELLE: YOU!!

DAMIEN: Of course! It is I, Damien Anto, Master Thief! You see there was never any priest, but only me on the other side of that wicker window, dressed as a priest in this priest outfit I stole.

SGANARELLE: (*pulling madly at his hair*) AAAHH!!

DAMIEN: As you now realize, I was merely pretending to be a priest to make you into a joke and embarrass you for my amusement! And I succeeded without you ever suspecting a thing. Oh what a slobbering mess you've become due to my cleverness! Look at you, eyes red with crying. How funny! Hahahaha!

SGANARELLE: You... you demon! How could you do this to me? How could you do this to another person?!

DAMIEN: All right, all right, that's enough. I hope you got that out of your system. Now wipe those tears from your mustache and go fetch those horses. Here's the coins back. But I'm keeping the hat, you don't deserve it. Go.

SGANARELLE: Aaarrgh! Fine. I'll do as you say, master. Only because I must, for the sake of my poor family. But remember this cruelty well, for you'll have to explain yourself when you are standing before the pearly gates. (*turns to leaves, runs into DOTTORE*) Oh excuse me sir I didn't see-- GASP! Cardinal Dottore!? You're you! I mean you're here! I mean-- your eminence! (*bows deeply*)

DOTTORE: Yes my son, it is I, Cardinal Dottore himself. Esteemed theologian of the church, titles, titles...

SGANARELLE: Sir, it is an honor to meet you! My name is Sganarelle D'Acklamede, I am humbled to be in your presence. Please excuse me for bumping into you, I tend to bumble sometimes.

DOTTORE: All is forgiven, my child. But who is your friend here? He is clearly a man of the cloth, but I do not recognise either of you.

DAMIEN: Oh, I am of no importance. Really I must be going-- (*turns to leave*)

SGANARELLE: Oh! Nonsense, master. (*stops DAMIEN from exiting*) For why did we travel so far if not to discuss Holy matters with an esteemed clergymen like Cardinal Dottore here? (*To DOTTORE*) Sir, here is my humble master, Damien Anto, Master Priest. We braved rugged roads through distant lands to come discuss the finer points of the faith. In specific detail. For many hours.

DOTTORE: Cardinal Anto! I welcome you to my humble parish. May I ask praytell in which of the Holy seminaries were you ordained? And by whose authority are you assigned to this Archdiocese?

DAMIEN: Oh yes... (*aside*) Damn you Sganarelle! (*to DOTTORE*) Yes. My lord, cardinal. My fellow cardinal I mean. I am a cardinal of the order of... Jesus? And I was sent here by the Earl of Pretzelvania, I mean by the Pope of Pretzelvania, I mean--

DOTTORE: The Pope of Pretzelvania? The POPE of PRETZELVANIA? I've never heard of any such Pope! (*suddenly sad*) Nobody tells me anything.

DAMIEN: Oh, uh, he's a... new Pope.

DOTTORE: But why would The Pretzelvanian Pope send you to Strozengruber for study?

DAMIEN: Well I wanted to try the famous Strotzengruber cuisine, of course.

DOTTORE: But Damien! Today marks the beginning of Lent. A time of holy fasting. We must not eat anything for forty days lest we fall to the sin of gluttony.

DAMIEN: Forty-- FORTY days? How could any man give up food for so long?

DOTTORE: Yes. 'Tis a trial of the flesh. So that in these days of hunger and starvation we might come closer to God and learn contentment amid our wants.

SGANARELLE: Yes master Damien sir, you knew that, right? Since you're a cardinal and all.

DAMIEN: Yes, Lent. I know about Lent. But forty days you say? You must keep yourself abreast of the goings on in the Vatticanal halls. Why, by the words of Saint... Dan it is sufficiently holy to merely refrain from the consumption of meat for one month.

SGANARELLE: What? You can't just make up doctrine!

DOTTORE: Well you laymen certainly can't, but those of us of the esteemed cloth, as the mouthpieces of Him on high, are infallibly free to interpret as the spirit reveals. I have heard of the wisdom of Saint Dan, and this new interpretation seems reasonable, and in line with what we know. *Obsequium religiosum*.

DAMIEN: Uh, yes. *Quid pro quo. Dramatis personae, Argumentum ad hominem*.

DOTTORE: Ahhh! Cardinal Damien, I can tell you are one of those esteemed Cardinals well versed in the teachings of many learned authorities. Are you so disposed that you could discuss some sublime subject at further length?

DAMIEN: Apologies, sir. I am in fact indisposed and my duties require my absolute attention.

DOTTORE: Most unfortunate. We absolutely must hold council tonight. I will not be denied.

DAMIEN: Yes. We could meet up for wienerschnitzel.

DOTTORE: Damien! Wienerschnitzel during lent? I must question your holy credentials to make so base a suggestion as to eat meat during the Lent season! Surely the most holy Saint Dan would never approve!

DAMIEN: Oh did I say that? From my own readings of the writings of St. Jim-iny. It is only on Fridays during lent that meat must never be consumed. For Friday is a holy day.

DOTTORE: It is the day they crucified Our Lord.

DAMIEN: That's it. Yep, Friday is holy for that reason. And because Friday is so holy and meat is so... evil? We must never in good conscience eat meat on Friday during lent unless under the most serious of emergency meat-eating situations. Fish is ok. In fact chicken too, why not?

DOTTORE: Yes, quite! That makes so much sense. You're only forbidden from eating red meat on Fridays during Lent unless under some pressure not to. Like you forget. I forget sometimes.

SGANARELLE: No! What?! (What just happened to Lent?!) You can't just get rid of Lent! It's a core part of the Christian calendar with years of meaning and--

DOTTORE: Oh I can't can I? Who are you to question the words of a cardinal?
The words of God?

DAMIEN: Yeah, who are you, cretin?

SGANARELLE: But your eminences! You're ruining Christianity!

DOTTORE: I'll teach you to speak to a cardinal that way!

(DOTTORE starts beating SGANARELLE with his cane)

SGANARELLE: Sir, please! ACK!

DAMIEN: Ha! That'll will teach you to open your big mouth!

DOTTORE: And here's another for good measure!

DAMIEN: *(joins the beating)* Yes! Here's some absolution for you!

SGANARELLE: Damien, no!

DOTTORE: How's this for flagellation?

DAMIEN: Ha, yeah, that's a good one! Flagellate him, Dottore!

SGANARELLE: Please, sirs! Stop! I take it back, I take it back!

DOTTORE: I will absolve you of your sins, my child. But first you must say one million Hail Marys.

SGANARELLE: What?!

DAMIEN: Yeah! Make that two million, for insulting two cardinals.

DOTTORE: Yes, very fair. Now I must bid you farewell. I have to pray for the sickly people of my town.

DAMIEN: Yes, and I must visit the reliquary to pray.

SGANARELLE: Wait, good sirs, please. I am a servant to my Lord Damien Anto here, famous cardinal of great renown, and he has come to try the cuisine of Strotzengreuber, that is true. But he has also has come to know the people, and pray over their thoroughly afflicted bodies.

DAMIEN: Well, I don't--

SGANARELLE: Why not let my Lord here pray over the sickly? He, like all Cardinals, has many prayers memorized and would surely be happy to say a few words for them.

DOTTORE: Oh really...?

DAMIEN: Um, no, actually, I have a bit of a cough, (*fakes cough*) I must be going now I'm afraid--

SGANARELLE: Nonsense sir, your voice sounds fine! He's very nervous speaking in front of the mangled and infectious.

DOTTORE: Caring for the sick and the downtrodden are major facets of our profession. You must overcome your fear of the afflicted. Please, this way, the sick are gathered over here--

DAMIEN: No, I couldn't, really--

DOTTORE: -- right next to the reliquary.

DAMIEN: Oh. The reliquary you say? Yes, I suppose I could espouse some meaningless platitudes for the leperous masses.

DOTTORE: It is literally the least we can do.

(*They exit. Lights change, they re-enter*)

SGANARELLE: Well sir? Willing to brave the hordes of lepers for your unholy quest?

DAMIEN: I've survived worse. Besides, I have science on my side. Look here. *(pulls out flower)* A pungent flower. Quite pretty, isn't it?

SGANARELLE: Ah! You've brought smells to protect yourself? Of course you'd think of that. Have you another for your *valet*?

DAMIEN: Asking for favors after trying to sabotage my work, eh? I did happen to steal two flowers from the market for just such an occasion. *(pulls another flower)* One for each of my nostrils.

SGANARELLE: Oh, you cad!

DOTTORE: Here we are. I'm happy you came along, Damien. I wouldn't step near them myself. I'll leave you to it. *(exits quickly)*

JERONTE: Ooooh! Bless me Father! I am a sick, dirty, disgusting, ugly, pox-ridden, mangy, gross old man, and I am in need of help!

DAMIEN: Oh God!

SGANARELLE: Eehhk! Sir, let's give up this mission. It can't be worth risking our lives wading through the sick.

DAMIEN: I'll get us through. *(to JERONTE)* You, disgusting old man.

JERONTE: Yes?

DAMIEN: *Post hoc ergo propter hoc! Flagrante delicto!*

JERONTE: What?

DAMIEN: Uh... *Alma mater! Deus ex machina!* There. You're healed. Now stand aside.

JERONTE: I'm healed? Really?

DAMIEN: Yes, excuse me.

JERONTE: I'm healed! I'M HEALED!!

SICK1: Father? P-pardon me, father...

DAMIEN: What, what do you want?

SICK1: Mine eyes have ceased to function and the light of my world has gone out. Was it some sin of mine that caused God to punish me so?

DAMIEN: *Per aspera ad astra. Carpe Diem. Et tu, Brute.* There you are, all better. Now stand aside.

SICK1: But will I see again, father? When will God restore my sight?

DAMIEN: Uh... tomorrow, my child. You will be able to see again tomorrow, I guarantee it.

SICK1: Oh wondrous miracle!

DAMIEN: Yes, wondrous. Excuse me...

SICK1: Everyone! He saved me! For once I was blind, but tomorrow I'll see!

(more sick people start to surround DAMIEN and SGANARELLE)

DAMIEN: Yes, I just need to get through, you see. I need to reach the--

SICK2: Oh blessed father! I can barely walk, and barely breath. I am covered in pus-filled abscesses. Please, let me show you... *(starts to remove clothes)*

DAMIEN: (*retching*) Nonono, uh, *bona fide, pro bono, e pluribus unum*. There, healed. Excuse me...

(*the sick crowd them and ad lib pleas for help*)

DAMIEN: Yes, *hocus pocus*, uh, *magnum cum laude*, ugh, please don't crowd, *non sequitur, post mortem, semper fi*, ok, all of you are healed now, you're all healed, and I need to get through, so please get out of the way.

SICKLY PEOPLE: We're healed! It's a miracle! Hooray!

JERONTE: I'm not healed.

SICK3: Hey, he didn't heal Jeronte.

DAMIEN: Uh... if you're not healed yet then you... don't have enough faith.

JERONTE: Oh. (*beat*) Well, I guess I'm a little bit healed.

DAMIEN: Right. Please leave, I'm trying to get to the reliquary.

SICK3: Leave? You mean we can go back out and be with our families?

DAMIEN: Yeah whatever get outta here.

SICKLY PEOPLE: Hooray!! (*they all exit*)

SGANARELLE: Ack! No! Wait! Please! You can't... I mean... he's not...

DAMIEN: There we are. Our path is clear. Pretty good for an *agnostic*, eh *valet*?

SGANARELLE: Sir, those people could spread their sickness to the countryside! There'll be an epidemic!

DAMIEN: What better distraction for continuous thievery than everyone being bedridden? Now come. The reliquary lies before us. Here, you will witness me get the thing.

SGANARELLE: ...The spear tip.

DAMIEN: ... what?

SGANARELLE: The SPEAR TIP? You're trying to steal the SPEAR TIP!

DAMIEN: Yeah, the thing, whatever. Let's just get on with it. I need to... *take*.

SGANARELLE: Dear God. Damien-- Damien, wait! Stop! I must speak my mind. I will not sleep well from this moment on if you do not let me speak!

DAMIEN: Sganarelle... Must you be so dramatic?

SGANARELLE: When I first agreed to sign that dreadful contract, I found you to be clever and exciting, and the promise of employment under you intoxicating. Then I learned you were a remorseless thief, completely dedicated to your craft, selfish and scheming, single-minded in your stealing.

Even then, I admired your resourcefulness, agility, shrewdness. Only later did I learn you were cruel, loving of beating your servants, tricky for amusements sake, and horrid to all who didn't offer you a treasure to steal. Even then, though, I thought you innocent of all this, as if your sick mind was not your own, your sinful cravings uncontrollable and even incomprehensible to you. Like you were a beast, too ignorant to understand your own brutishness.

But now, here in Strotzengurber, amidst the beautiful flowers and pretzels, I have finally come to know you for who you really are. I fear you are *pure evil*, master. A creature permanently ensnared in the maw of Satan. You relish in your wickedness, and seem to strive to become more wicked for every good thing you see, and seek to take and dirty every wonderful thing, as if the mere idea of goodness were some sort of personal insult against you.

This is the fact of the matter. If you do not halt here and pray for forgiveness, you will be damned to the most terrible level of Hell. Now is your very last chance!

DAMIEN: Are you still talking? Here, hold this.

(DAMIEN begins to pile ancient treasures onto SGANARELLE)

SGANARELLE: Hey! Weren't you listening at all? What is thi-- GASP! The blessed chalice of antioch!

DAMIEN: Ooo, this looks nice. Here.

SGANARELLE: Ack! What are these, bones? Are these the bones of Saint Peter?! Sir, I cannot hold these, they are far too holy!

DAMIEN: And here's another one, and oooo, here we go...

SGANARELLE: ACK! The Silver Crucifix of Saint Michael! ACK! The Monza ampullae! ACK! A blood-stained cup, fit for a carpenter! Is this the HOLY GRAIL?!

DAMIEN: And this and this and this and this and this---

SGANARELLE: Sir, please, stop! I can't hold all of these priceless, holy treasures! I've never held so many amazing things, and probably neither has anyone else in history! I must set them down before I topple over and destroy the history of God's church!

DAMIEN: Oh, these are heavy. Gotta be worth something.

SGANARELLE: THE STONE TABLETS OF MOSES?! Waitwaitwaitwait--
UUURRRGH!!

DAMIEN: Oooooo, an ancient Roman spear! Still mostly intact. Long enough to use, if need be. *(starts to play with it)*

SGANARELLE: The Spear of Destiny, that holy weapon which pierced the side of God! Sir, put that back! PLEASE!

DAMIEN: Don't you tell me what to do, Sganarelle! (*whack*)

SGANARELLE: ACK! No! Please sir, don't beat with with the Lance of Longinus!

DAMIEN: Still giving me orders, eh? I'll show you what for! HA! (*whacking*)

SGANARELLE: No! ACK! Sir! ACK! Please! ACK!

DAMIEN: Yes, don't like it, do you? Jesus didn't like it either!

(*SGANARELLE screams and slips, falling to the ground, dropping everything*)

DAMIEN: Sganarelle, you fool! You've fallen and smashed all of my treasure!

SGANARELLE: Nooo... NOOOO!! Oh Jesus... they're all shattered, every last piece. What have you done?!

DAMIEN: Don't look at me, you're the one who dropped them.

SGANARELLE: My Lord, I have forsaken your holy will. I have torn down the most holy tabernacle of the Kingdom of Israel. I have sundered the body of the rock of the great church! This is worse than the Fall in Eden, worse than the murder of Abel, worse than the unspeakable sins of the uncircumcized baby-eating Sodomites! Never before has any man or demon committed such a blasphemy and never again shall a more evil deed be done!

DAMIEN: You think so? Hup hup! (*DAMIEN jumps on the relics and starts dancing merrily*)

SGANARELLE: GASP! Damien, what are you doing?!

DAMIEN: Look at me Sganarelle, look at me! I'm dancing a jig on the shattered pieces of your faith! I care not for your silly beliefs, nor this dusty old trash!

SGANARELLE: No! Stop! You can't dance on Saint Peter's bones, you CAN'T!

(Lightning strikes, the ground cracks open and shoots flames. Demonic hands emerge and grab DAMIEN.)

SGANARELLE: Sir, I fear you've just made a thoroughly accurate exclamation! Hell hath opened up beneath you!

SGANARELLE: I can't, master - the flames are too hot!

(DAMIEN is dragged into Hell. Then, the earth closes and all is silent.)

DOTTORE: (*enters suddenly*) I saw the whole thing!

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horrible sins, and sent him straight to Hell. Praise be to God, for he is just and good.

SGANARELLE: Oh, oh, oh! (*SGANARELLE cries and falls to his knees*)

DOTTORE: Do not cry, my child. Your wicked master will not torture you any longer. Despite Damien's horrendous blasphemies and crimes, God is satisfied. We are truly blessed to have witnessed such a miracle.

SGANARELLE: Yes... (*standing*) So it seems his death has satisfied everyone: Offended Heaven, seduced girls, deceived fathers, dishonored families, impoverished victims, insulted Lords, bamboozled constables, swindled merchants, even rival thieves... All are finally content... Except me! I am the only one left unhappy. Doesn't anyone see the true tragedy of this tale? My wages! My wages! Who will pay my wages?! (*stupid comedy sound, lights down*)

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